Asymmetric Warfare: A State vs Non-State Conflict*

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ABSTRACT

Asymmetry in warfare is not a new phenomenon. Historically, it has been observed that on various occasions there has been a marked difference in the relative military power and strategy of the warring states. However, in the post 9/11 era, it has been observed that the character and nature of war itself is changing particularly amid the wars between state and non-state actors. The usage of unconventional tools and tactics, be it guerrilla warfare or terrorism or irregular warfare or any other forms are becoming more synonymous with non-state entities. All this is leading to a composition of warfare in which a non-state actor is using asymmetric methods to target the state's vulnerabilities to achieve disproportionate effect. This paper debates the notion of Asymmetric Warfare, the characters of actors involved and the nature of the state's response in the 21st century.

Key words: Asymmetric, warfare, strategy, non-state actor, terrorism.

Guerras asimétricas: un conflicto entre Estado *versus* actores no estatales

RESUMEN

La asimetría en la guerra no es un fenómeno nuevo. Históricamente, se ha observado que en varias ocasiones ha existido una marcada diferencia en el relativo poder militar y estratégico de Estados en guerra. Sin embargo, en la era pos 9/11, se ha observado que el carácter y la naturaleza de la guerra está cambiando, particularmente en las guerras entre actores estatales y no estatales. El uso de herramientas y tácticas no convencionales, ya sea guerra de guerrillas, terrorismo, guerra irregular, o cual-

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quier otra forma, está siendo más similar con entidades no estatales. Todo esto está llevando a una composición de guerra en la cual un actor no estatal usa métodos asimétricos dirigidos a las vulnerabilidades del Estado para lograr un efecto desproporcional. Este ensayo debate la noción de "guerra asimétrica", el carácter de los actores involucrados y la naturaleza de la respuesta del Estado en el siglo xxi.

Palabras clave: asimetría, guerra, estrategia, actor no estatal, terrorismo.

The history of strategic ideas and the classical understanding of warfare since World War I were largely built on the assumption that wars would take place among state actors. A new entity, the non-state actor, brought to the centre-stage by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, has challenged the state's authority and sovereignty much more seriously than ever before. This unexpected terrorist assault on the United States can be considered to be the beginning of the end of Clausewitz's theory of wars between the states and the concept of the conventional adversary's "centre of gravity" (Clausewitz, 1984). This incident can be viewed as an example of a non-state actor's 'victory' over a superpower.

Historically, weak powers have sought to avoid an opponent's strengths and instead attempted to exploit the latter's weaknesses. But the application of hitherto unexplored and innovative means for attacking an adversary's weaknesses is termed as "asymmetric warfare". In a way, seeking asymmetries is fundamental to all wars. But in the modern context, asymmetric warfare emphasises what is popularly perceived as unconventional or non-traditional methodologies (Hughes, 1998).

In the post 9/11 era there is a need to undertake detailed study analysing the asymmetry between the state and non-state actor, as well as the state's reaction to such asymmetric threats. However, before that, it is essential to put this notion of asymmetry in the context of present day and emerging threats. This paper attempts to look at the past and present debate on this issue with a view that this understanding may help to define asymmetry in present day context. The paper also attempts to project some of the concerns of the modern world about asymmetric warfare and may help to provide insights for the broader formulation of the doctrines for state responses.

IDEA OF ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

War can be said to be as old as human society and it certainly features prominently in the recorded histories of state-cultures. But it is a complex issue and war seems to be changing more quickly than ever before (Gray, 1997). There is great debate over the definition of war; the types of warfare; and why wars happen, even when most people do not want them to. Representatives of many different academic disciplines have separately attempted to answer these questions.

War is defined as an armed conflict between two or more governments or states. Clausewitz (1984) defined war as "an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will" (p. 75). Michael Walzer (2000), the author of the book, *Just and Unjust Wars*,

defines war as a "legal condition, which equally permits two or more groups to carry on a conflict by armed forces" (p. 41). When such conflicts assume global proportions, they are known as world wars. War between different parts or factions within the same nation is called civil war. Conflicts or wars in which major powers purposely refrain from employing all their armed strength are often known as limited wars (Singh, 1995). Inter-state wars are generally terminated by treaty and civil wars by a peace proclamation.

The methods and practice of war, or warfare, can be broadly divided into various types based on periods of time (like prehistoric warfare, ancient warfare, modern warfare); by theatre, meaning where it is being fought (land warfare, naval warfare, air warfare); by type of weapons used (submarine warfare, chemical warfare, nuclear warfare); by the peoples involved (Roman warfare, Chinese warfare, Arab warfare) or by tactics used (like guerrilla warfare, siege warfare, asymmetric warfare) (Asprey, 1975; History of Warfare).

Despite these various manifestations of warfare, the early years of the 21st century seem to have become dominated by asymmetric warfare. Asymmetry means the absence of a common basis of comparison in respect to a quality, or in operational terms, a capability. All conflicts are asymmetric to some extent and the clever combatant has always exploited this quality. The nature of asymmetric warfare being dynamic, asymmetry can be categorised differently under different situations.

In broad terms, asymmetric warfare can be said to comprise three main types, namely strategic asymmetry, tactical asymmetry and war by proxy (Khan, 2005).

In the case of 'strategic asymmetric warfare', belligerents begin by deploying forces of a similar type, with the outcome being determined by the quality and quantity of the opposing forces. Often when belligerents deploy forces of a similar type, the outcome of a battle and/or campaign is determined by the numerical advantage enjoyed or better command and control exercised by one side.

In 'tactical asymmetric warfare', one side enjoys a technological advantage that can outweigh even the numerical advantage of the enemy. Training and tactics as well as technology can prove decisive and allow a smaller force to overcome much larger forces. If the inferior power is in a position of self-defence; i.e., under attack or occupation, it may be possible to use unconventional tactics, such as hit-and-run and selective battles to exploit the weaknesses of the superior power, as an effective means of harassment without violating the laws of war. Lastly, in case of 'war by proxy', asymmetric warfare is carried out (generally covertly) by non-governmental actors who are connected to or are sympathetic to a particular nation's (the state actor's) interest. That is, a non-state actor serves as a proxy of the state actor.

In his typology of asymmetry, Kenneth McKenzie (2000) has identified six main types of potential asymmetric threats: nuclear, chemical, biological, information operations, operational concepts and terrorism. From the US point of view, types of asymmetric threats have been identified to include attacks by

WMD, regional military threats and asymmetric threats in which state and non-state adversaries avoid direct engagement but devise strategies, tactics and weapons to minimise US strengths and exploit its weaknesses (Kolet, 2001; McKenzie, 2000).

In the post-modern warfare era, the character and nature of war is being altered by technological, social and cultural advances. At the same time, it has been observed that warfare is beginning to be dominated by unconventional tactics. War and warfare has been transformed from state centricity to a condition where reason of state no longer drives belligerency (Creveld, 1991). Thus, war in the post-modern era is experiencing two entirely different types of philosophies. One is based on technological advancements and is state-centric in character, while the other is based on usage of unconventional tools and tactics, and is more synonymous with non-state entities. At present, the act of a non-state actor against a state is being loosely termed as an act of asymmetric warfare. It is perceived that such warfare is threatening to occupy the leading edge of strategic potency, much as revolutionary and nuclear warfare occupied the third quarter of the twentieth century. In this context, the term asymmetry encompasses various tactics of war-fighting like guerrilla warfare, terrorism, irregular warfare, etc. These wars originate from conflicts over scarce resources, ethnic and religious issues, transnational crime (with its linkage to terrorism and insurgency), migration and illegal immigration, border disputes, famine and state collapse (Mendel, 1995-96).

However, asymmetric warfare is not a new concept; it dates back to the Roman occupation of Spain. Practitioners of the asymmetric approach concentrate limited attacks against regular military forces' critical vulnerabilities by using treachery to undermine the overmatch of technology and aggregate forces of their adversaries (Metz, 2001). Indirect references to asymmetry can also be found in the writings of ancient Chinese military theorist Sun Tzu. In his famous book, *Art of War,* he discusses subjects like unorthodox and orthodox tactics. Here, unorthodox tactics are described as tactics that are primarily realised through employing forces, especially flexible ones, in imaginative, unconventional, unexpected ways (Tzu, 1994). In the recent past, the first reference to asymmetric conflict was in an article on the US experience in Vietnam by Andrew Mack (1974; Cassidy, 2003).

The term asymmetry has multiple dimensions. Over the last few years, the words 'asymmetry' and 'asymmetric' have come into vogue in strategic studies and political science discourses. Wars, enemies, battles, strategies, approaches, options, challenges and many other phenomena related to armed conflict have all been labelled asymmetric. Given this multiplicity of dimensions, it is evident that using this concept to describe only threats may create confusion in the minds of commanders. Hence, asymmetry must mean more than "simply making maximum use of one's advantage" or fighting differently (Blank, 2004).

An elaboration of the concept of asymmetric challenges to national security is found in one US document (Government of the United States, 2009):

> Asymmetric approaches are attempts to circumvent or undermine US strengths while exploiting US weaknesses using methods that differ significantly from the United States' expected method of operations…These generally seek a major psychological impact such as shock or confusion that affects an opponent's initiative, freedom of action or will. Asymmetric methods require an appreciation of the opponent's vulnerabilities. Asymmetric approaches often employ innovative, non-traditional tactics, weapons or technologies and can be applied at all levels of warfare, strategic, operational and tactical and across the spectrum of military operations (Metz, 2001).

Another interpretation of asymmetrical warfare is that of irregular warfare or unconventional warfare as defined by Robert J Bunker (1999). He defines unconventional warfare as a form of conflict, other than conventional wars, waged by the army of a nation-state. In this view, asymmetric warfare is mostly covert war, waged at low intensity by guerrilla groups, religious cults, drug cartels and even special force components of regular armed forces. Thus, amongst the practitioners and propagators of asymmetric/unconventional war are Sun Tzu, Lettow, TE Lawrence, Lenin, Mao, and modern guerrilla leaders like Che Guevara and Marighella (Bunker, 1999, p. 141; Bhonsle, 2004).

Also, over the years, some attempts have been made to systematically analyse the outcome of asymmetric conflicts and a few have seen the asymmetries, which characterise the conflict as being critical to an understanding of the outcome. Rosen (1972) considers asymmetry in power and "willingness to suffer costs"; Katzenbach (1962) examines the asymmetry in "tangible" and "intangible resources"; Galtung (Mack, 1975) distinguishes between "social" and "territorial defence" (asymmetry in goals); Kissinger (1969) mentions asymmetry in overall strategy (physical versus psychological attrition); and Kraemer distinguishes "colonial" versus "non-colonial" guerrilla wars (Mack, 1975). Successful asymmetric tactics used by non-state actors in the last few decades have proved that asymmetric war is a contest of will. Psychological defeat is often much more damaging and longer lasting than battlefield reverses. Arguably, the easiest way to achieve this is to attack the enemy where it feels most comfortable and confident (Goulding, 2000-01).

Today, leading thinkers assert that we have witnessed a revolution in political affairs, with the major powers now unlikely to go to war with each other. Rather, they are more likely to intervene in conflicts involving weak states, militia groups, drug cartels and terrorists (Freedman, 1998). This theory holds well, not only for major powers, but also for some developing powers that understand the limitations of wars in conflict resolution. At the same time, in a few cases, some weak states have challenged the state's authority and succeeded. The most well-known example is the Vietnam-America war. During the last few decades, however, a new phenomenon has been observed wherein some weak powers / failing states have started challenging the authority of strong powers by covertly supporting non-state actors.

Asymmetric warfare is not synonymous with terrorism. The current literature libera-

lly uses terminologies like asymmetric actor and terrorist interchangeably. However, in pre-empting the terrorist are we really dealing with asymmetry, or is something else at work? Thinking of the threat as only asymmetric misses the mark, especially if we have got the concept wrong. The combination of asymmetry and the terrorists' ability to continually devise idiosyncratic approaches presents the real challenge. Assessing the distinction and interrelationship between these two factors provides us with the initial understanding required to tackle the resultant operational challenges.

Terrorism is a part of a tactic used by the weaker side in an asymmetric conflict. But, at times, it is also called asymmetric warfare by advocates for partisans using terrorist methods to avoid any pejorative connotations; likewise, occupying powers often label partisans as "terrorists" as part of propaganda campaigns to maintain support in their home country and to win over the occupied people so as to cut off the partisans' principal support base. This is the root of the phrase "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" (Assymmetric Warfare).

Asymmetric engagements are battles between dissimilar forces. These engagements can be extremely lethal, especially if the force being attacked is not ready to defend itself against the threat (Alred, 1995). Similarly, asymmetric warfare has been described as war between two sides with very dissimilar goals (Libicki, 1997), which makes the fight inherently asymmetrical from the start. The term "non-traditional" is also used to define asymmetric warfare because it employs methods that do not fit into our traditional picture of warfare–big armies pitted against each other on the battlefield, using similar strategy, tactics and weapons. Asymmetric warfare has also been called "… using new technology to 'defeat the superior with the inferior'" (Pillsbury, 1998). In broad terms asymmetric warfare is defined as warfare that involves attacking an adversary's weaknesses with unexpected or innovative means while avoiding his strengths (Hughes, 1998).

Asymmetric strategies attack vulnerabilities not appreciated by the 'target' (victim) or capitalise on the victim's limited preparation against any threat. These strategies rely (primarily, but not exclusively) on concepts of operations that are fundamentally different from the victim's and/or from those of recent history. They often employ new or different weapons. Additionally, they can serve political or strategic objectives that are not the same as those the victim pursues (Bennett *et al.*, 1998).

All these "definitions" are acceptable, in turn suggesting that asymmetric warfare is a combination of all of them. However, regardless of any "definition", the bottom line is that asymmetric warfare encompasses anything –strategy, tactics, weapons and personnel– that alters the battlefield to negate the other's advantages. However, in order to identify the exact nature of asymmetry in a particular type of conflict/war, it is essential to narrow down its focus. This is essential because the existing definitions, while narrowly accurate, seem insufficient in explaining asymmetry in respect of conflicts between states and non-state actors. In view of this, there is a need to establish a working definition of asymmetric warfare.

Definition

Asymmetric warfare could be defined as: "a form of warfare in which a non-state actor uses unconventional tools and tactics against a state's vulnerabilities to achieve disproportionate effect, undermining the state's will to achieve its strategic objectives".

UNFOLDING FROM THE PAST

The concept of asymmetric warfare is as old as warfare itself. In broad terms, asymmetric warfare involves attacking an adversary's weaknesses with unexpected or innovative means while avoiding his strengths (Hughes, 1998). Asymmetric warfare encompasses a wide scope of theory, experience, conjecture and definition; the implicit premise is that asymmetric warfare deals with the unknown(s), with surprise in terms of ends, ways and means (Ancker & Burke, 2003). Some examples may be illustrative.

The history of Rome extends from 753 BC. Rome's political growth followed a line of development similar to that of the Greek city-states: limited monarchy of sorts. Rome fought a few battles for its survival. Post 270 BC, Carthage (what is today Tunisia (Carthage, n.d.)) was Rome's main rival in the West, as it was concentrating upon enlarging its empire in Spain. This led to the greatest and most difficult war in Roman history, the second Punic War, which can be termed as a classic case of asymmetric warfare.

The war has its origins in the attack by the young Carthaginian general, Hannibal, on Saguntum, a Spanish town, claimed by Rome as an ally. Rome declared war. Seizing the initiative, Hannibal, in an unconventional move in 218 BC, speed-marched an army of about 40,000 men, 9000 cavalry troops and even a detachment of African elephants across the Alps into Italy in 14 days, something not attempted before. The crossing cost him nearly half of his men and almost all the elephants. But, his tactics yielded results: Hannibal defeated the Romans, a superior power with higher degree of war waging machinery, three times in three years. Numerically, Hannibal's forces never matched those that the Romans had. At Cannae, for example, where Hannibal won his greatest victory, some 70,000 Romans were wiped out by just 50,000 Carthaginians (Chaliand, 1994). Hannibal's unconventional tactics, using raids and threats to contest a big and well-equipped Roman force, paid off.

Again, in the 1960s, the Americans chose Vietnam as a place to draw the line for communist expansionism. In August 1964, a presumed North Vietnamese attack on the cruiser Maddox led to an American retaliatory strike. In February 1965, an attack on the American advisers' barracks in the Central Highland city of Pleiku triggered a retaliatory raid. By July 1965, the US combat units were fully committed and their troop presence began to grow, reaching 543,000 by early 1969 (Kissinger, 1994). Nearly 60,000 Americans were killed and hundreds of thousands came home wounded, either physically or mentally (Melanson, 2005; Notes on Rome, n.d.). This war, which nearly lasted for more than a decade, can be referred to as a classic case of asymmetric warfare in recent times. In this conflict, the US forces were superior in every important department,

from firepower to manpower. What cost them dearly was their complete underestimation of the opponent. What North Vietnam lacked in technology and financial resources, they more than made up with their tenacity and commitment. They were willing to pay any price to achieve their goals (Vietnam History 3).

Even the Persian Gulf War in 1991 saw asymmetric warfare (Dinstein, 1994). Iraq launched Scud missiles and the coalition used Stealth aircraft to fire precision weapons against the Iraqis. American air strikes on mobile Scud launchers during this war were aimed at wrecking Iraq's tactical capability to launch ballistic missiles. Here, airpower helped achieve the stated American goals of "immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait" and "restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government" (Clodfelter, 2002). This war proved that it is not always the weaker power that gains victory due to asymmetry but occasionally, the stronger power too can gain victory because of its asymmetrical advantage in respect of technology and firepower. As these examples show, asymmetric warfare is using something extraordinary or never seen before to gain advantage (Allen).

But they also raise the basic question: how do the weak win wars? The likelihood of victory and defeat in asymmetric conflicts depends on the interaction of the strategies the weak and strong actors use. Independent of regime type and weapons technology, the interaction of similar strategic approaches favours the strong actors while opposite strategic approaches favour the weak[2].

At the beginning of the 21st century, more than 60 low and medium-intensity wars were raging around the planet–roughly double the average number during the Cold War period. Concurrently, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), multiplying acts of terrorism and increasing numbers of "rogue" or "failed" states (which may possess or pursue weapons of mass destruction and/or support terrorists) have redefined both the nature of war and the concept of security.

THE DEBATE

International stability and national security has been challenged in the past as well. But in the last few decades, a new phenomenon has emerged where an explosion of domestic conflict challenges the stability and even the existence of a state. Most of these domestic conflicts have an ethnic dimension and a few of them had been previously subdued by authoritarian state-centres. But, over time, these conflicts took on a different shape, with the emergence of non-state actors. This is because this entity became powerful enough to challenge the state's authority by using asymmetric tactics.

The emergence of well-established, well-connected and well-armed non-state actors has made intra-state conflicts bloodier. Understanding the connotation of present day asymmetry between a state and a non-state

[2] A new approach to understanding asymmetric conflicts is put forth in the forthcoming book by Ivan Arreguín-Toft (n.d.).

actor in the backdrop of intra-state conflicts is relevant for studying asymmetric warfare of the 21st century.

Intra-state conflicts are not a new phenomenon. Since 1945, they have been more frequent and more violent than inter-state warfare (Abazi, n.d.). With the end of the Cold War, these tendencies increased, following the lines of ethno-national and separatist-armed conflicts, bringing a significant shift in the perception of security issues and alternative approaches to tackle them, especially in Europe. In particular, the changing dialogue of sovereignty, identity and security, and international responsibility appears to have become increasingly significant. Considering that the propositions in international relations depend on both empirical validity and logical soundness, a theoretical exercise on the case of intra-state conflicts questions the validity of the traditional state-developed concept of security. The path is open to new interpretations and understanding of normative, operational and structural issues.

The lessons from earlier intra-state conflicts reveal that the traditional schools of international relations do not provide satisfactory tools for the understanding of "the current status of war and peace in the international system" (Abazi, n.d.). They reveal that intra-state conflicts are no longer only a state affair. The distinction between inter-state conflicts and intra-state conflicts is getting muddled, and it depends from which point of view one is looking at the conflict. So, "if a province, an integrated portion of a state's territory, or a fraction of the population refuses to submit to the centralised power and undertakes an armed struggle, the conflict, though a civil war with regard to international war, will be considered a foreign war by those who see the rebels as the expression of an existing or nascent nation" (Abazi, n.d.).

Nevertheless, not all internal conflicts can break out into asymmetric war. Intra-state conflicts erupt in a violent manner and become separatist movements when they "involve an armed confrontation between a sovereign independent state and a regionally-based movement, seeking to break away or seeking an extended form of internal territorial self-rule" (Abazi, n.d.). Hence, within an intra-state conflict, when a group challenges state authority in a violent manner, that group is generally referred to as a non-state actor.

Non-state actors also break another state monopoly–the monopoly on the use of force. While states are accountable to other states in the United Nations system in terms of international law and to their own citizens (at least in democratically-governed countries) in terms of domestic law and values, violent non-state actors appear subject to no laws. The classic violent non-state actors include terrorist groups, insurgent armed militias and organised crime networks (UN Global Security, n.d.).

These trends pose very real threats to the future of both developing and industrialised societies. Conventional armed conflicts–which are primarily intra-state in scope and geographically limited to developing regions–damage the environment, disrupt economies and shatter societies. However, civilians suffer more drastically from current forms of warfare, which may include ethnic expulsions and even genocide as deliberate strategies.

Asymmetric conflict also causes destruction of the financial, information and technological infrastructures that underpin modern societies. Whereas previous wars were between armies and nations, and largely fought over spheres of influence, the wars of the 21st century are likely to involve more shadowy players with very different motives. Driven by a growing rich-poor divide, environmental scarcity and the increasing susceptibility to disruption on the part of technologically advanced societies, future conflicts may pit not only nations against each other, but also marginalised groups within the nation against its elite.

Paramilitary "resistance" groups –religiously and ethnically different, or not– may strike out against those they see, internally or externally, as threatening their cultural, economic or political agendas. Paramilitary "security forces" will intervene to protect the elite and maintain the status quo. And highly organised "gangs" may fight to control trafficking in drugs, human beings or commodities.

While ostensibly opposed, these groups may at times ally with each other to achieve specific objectives. Their tactics may include pre-emptive or retaliatory assassinations and massacres, and their targets may include individuals, government entities, civil institutions and infrastructure, and corporations. In an increasingly chaotic world, it will be very difficult to tell the "good guys" from the "bad guys" (Global Issues, n.d.).

State support or sponsorship of insurgencies was common during the Cold War era, as the United States, the Soviet Union, and various regional powers backed their favoured proxies, often transforming local quarrels into international contests. Today, states such as Iran, Rwanda, Angola and Pakistan, as well as various types of non-state supporters, play a major role in creating or sustaining insurgencies by offering fighters, training or other important forms of support (RAND, n.d.).

Considerable debate is ongoing within the political and military communities as to the kind of responses (military or otherwise) that should be developed to meet the challenges of asymmetric threat posed by such non-state actors. Part of the debate centres on addressing the root cause of the problem while the other part concentrates on the improvisation of military techniques. Many argue that the lack of socio-economic progress in certain parts of the world is the reason for the emergence of the non-state actor. However, unable to bear the cost of asymmetric war, particularly the human cost, state actors are attempting to incorporate rapid technological changes into their war fighting mechanisms.

Despite the technical and military supremacy enjoyed by state-actors, the future does not appear to lack potential threats. The growing gap between the haves and have-nots, religious tensions and lack of resources will fuel terrorists and extremists. There is also a danger that criminal elements, drug cartels and mercenaries or terrorists will join hands to create an enemy (the transnational threat), which will shun the battlefield and fight by means that will nullify the military superiority of conventional forces. The main tactic of such forces will be to exploit "asymmetries", using the weaknesses inherent in a technological force with stand-off weaponry (Craig, n.d.).

The non-state actor, motivated purely by hatred, revenge or religious fervour, represents the greatest danger to society today. There is even the distinct possibility that non-state actors will wage war by using weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The American invasion of Iraq represents a dilemma. The US military defeated the Saddam regime and its military component with ease, but is finding it extremely difficult to defeat the non-state actors through conventional war fighting mechanisms. The US' weaknesses stem principally from its over-reliance on technical solutions, ill-preparedness for an urban battleground and failure to fully appreciate the human dimension of the problem.

Asymmetric warfare in case of a state-non-state conflict envisages engaging the adversary (state) by using different tools and tactics. The choice of such tools and tactics depends on the perceptions of the non-state actor. While known tools like terror, blackmail or bargain are frequently used, on occasions, the non-state actor has tried to bring in the element of surprise by using different techniques. Under this backdrop, the concept of asymmetry gets modified depending on the nature of the non-state actor.

To date, a few studies have been carried out in the areas of asymmetric warfare, specifically those analysing the reasons behind militarily and economically less powerful states initiating war against relatively strong states. These studies have focused on the strategic and political considerations, and the domestic and international compulsions that influence the weaker state to launch war against its more powerful adversary. These studies, in a way, have challenged the key argument of the deterrence theory that the military superiority of the *status quo* power coupled with a credible retaliatory threat will prevent attack by challengers (Paul, 1994).

The nature of warfare has been rapidly changing in the last few decades. It is expected that in coming decades, "brush fire" wars are likely to increase. The recent history of warfare is being written more by counter-insurgency campaigns, hostage rescue operations, drug wars, low intensity conflicts, urban combat, etc. (Staten, n.d.). In all these cases, the attacker is not a state power and methods of combat used by the attacker are mostly unconventional. This is rapidly changing the concept of asymmetry that was essentially restricted to a conflict between two state powers. While the war between the US and Vietnam is considered the best example of asymmetric war, in the post-Cold War context, the last such war was the one that took place against the Iraqi army in Kuwait and Iraq (Bishara, 2002).

In Gulf War I (1991), two state powers fought against each other. Here, both of the warring nations were answerable to an international system and in a way had parity in philosophy, attitude, values and beliefs. The asymmetric aspect lay in the differing war-fighting capabilities and military hardware of the two sides. If one applies the same analogy, then almost all wars in the world have been asymmetric, as will be all future wars between two state actors.

But in the present era, when a non-state actor is challenging state authority, it is operating outside international norms and value systems. It is initiating a war that has no rules.

It is bringing out many extraneous factors to make the fight unequal. This emergence of the non-state actor has brought forward different dimensions of "asymmetry" on the strategic calculus of global geopolitics.

No single theory can be sufficient to explain this new form of "asymmetry". The non-state actor has brought in a strange form of warfare, one where, for example, military force plays a much smaller (though still critical) role, often supporting initiatives that are more political, diplomatic and economic. This strangeness is blurring the distinction between war and peace. Some analysts are predicting that the resultant non-linearity may lead to the disappearance of definable battlefields or fronts, and even the distinction between 'civilian' and 'military' may disappear (DNInet).

While earlier asymmetry was more of a 'di-symmetry', meaning a quantitative difference in firepower and force, a strong state against a weak one (America against Vietnam or Iraq), today asymmetry can be viewed as more of a qualitative difference in the means, values and style of the new enemies (Bishara, n.d.). This brings in the need to enlarge the scope of assessment of asymmetrical warfare. It demands the examination of asymmetric warfare, beyond the consideration of war as a technological or engineering problem. It also demands the assessment of asymmetric warfare from the point of view of the culturally distinct perspective of enemies. Such wars are struggles of psyches and wills. In such wars, the enemy understands that it is not possible to physically defeat the military forces of the state authority. Hence, the non-state actor challenges the state by using new and innovative ways.

CONCLUSION

The concept of asymmetric challenges in case of non-state actors is an emerging concept. There is a need to address this changing concept of asymmetry by looking at the system in its totality rather than dissecting the parts and studying in isolation various dimensions like terrorism, guerrilla warfare and urban warfare. Also, as this threat is both developing and evolving, the nature of the state's defence thinking, training, weapons, equipment, intelligence operations and national emergency response systems need to be redefined and redirected (Staten). There is a need to analyse the nature and impact of various tools and tactics used by non-state actors in order to decide the state's responses.

Globally, it has been observed that the responses of the state towards asymmetric threat are not consistent and have varied from regime to regime. These responses largely depend on the pattern and causes of the asymmetric threat. The responses can be dependent on the state's policies towards finding solutions to tackling the threat.

There is a need to evolve an analytical framework to examine the concept of asymmetric warfare by looking at specific cases of state versus non-state conflicts. However, the entire gamut of asymmetric warfare should not be seen as a classic action-reaction-counteraction cycle because of the nature of actors involved and the unconventional nature of tools and tactics used by them to wage a war.

It is essential to understand the implications of such wars on the states' overall security. Unfortunately, the most difficult issue in case

of asymmetric warfare is that of threat identification and even response development. A problem with efforts to define an asymmetric threat is that they imply strongly that the universe of threats divides neatly into symmetric and asymmetric. It is difficult to qualify or quantify asymmetric threat if one extrapolates the argument "one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter" to "one culture's asymmetric threat is another culture's standard *modus operandi*" (Gray, 1997, p. 5).

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